

the streets, shrouding everything in a thick, brown, poisonous vapor created by the fog-mixing with the smoke pouring from thousands of chimneys.

The London that Peter visited and explored on foot was rich, vital, dirty and dangerous. The narrow streets were piled with garbage and filth which could be dropped freely from any overhanging window. Even the main avenues were dark and airless because greedy builders, anxious to gain more space, had projected upper stories out over the street. Through these Stygian alleys, crowds of Londoners jostled and pushed one another. Traffic congestion was monumental. Lines of carriages and hackney cabs cut deep ruts into the streets, so that passengers inside were tossed about, arriving breathless, nauseated and sometimes bruised. When two coaches met in a narrow street, fearful arguments ensued, with the two coachmen "saluting each other with such diabolical titles and bitter execrations as if every one was striving which should go to the Devil first." For short distances, to avoid the mud and pushing of the crowds, sedan chairs carried by two strong men were popular. Biggest of all were the overland coaches which rolled into London from the highroads, carrying commercial travelers and visitors from the country. Their destinations were the inns, where weary passengers could dine on cabbage and a pudding, Westphalian ham, chicken, beef, wine, mutton steaks and pigeons, and rise the next morning to a breakfast of ale and toast.

London was a violent city with coarse, cruel pleasures which quickly crushed the unprotected innocent. For women, the age of consent was twelve (it remained twelve in England until 1885). Crimes were common, and in some parts of the city people could not sleep for the cries of "Murder!" rising from the streets. Public floggings were a popular sight, and executions drew vast crowds. On "Hanging Day," workmen, shopkeepers and apprentices left their jobs to jam the streets, joking and laughing, and hoping to catch a glimpse of the condemned's face. Wealthy ladies and gentlemen paid for places in windows and balconies overlooking the route from Newgate Prison to Tyburn, where executions took place, or, best of all, in wooden stands especially erected to provide an unobstructed view. The most ghastly execution was the penalty for treason: hanging, drawing and quartering. The condemned man was strung up until he was almost dead from strangulation, then

cut down, disemboweled while still alive, beheaded, and his trunk was then chopped into quarters.

Sports were heavily stained with blood. Crowds paid to see bulls and bears set upon by enraged mastiffs; often, the teeth of the bear had been filed down and the cornered beast could only swat with his great paws at the mastiffs that leaped and tore at him. Cockfights attracted gamblers, and large purses were wagered on the specially trained fowl.

But, for all its violence, London was also a city where grace, beauty and civilized life were important. It was during this age that Sir Christopher Wren, the greatest of English architects, erected fifty-two new parish churches in London on sites wiped clean by the Great Fire. Their thin, glittering steeples gave London a breathtakingly distinctive skyline, dominated by Wren's masterpiece, the gigantic domed structure of St. Paul's Cathedral. The church was forty-one years in building, on the eve of Peter's arrival, the choir had just been opened for public worship.

For intelligent men, life in London centered on hundreds of coffee houses where the conversation could center on anything under the sun. Gradually, the different houses began to specialize in talk about politics, religion, literature, scientific ideas, business, shipping or agriculture. Choosing the house by the talk he wished to hear, a visitor could step in, sit by the fire, sip coffee and listen to every shade of opinion expressed in brilliant, learned and passionate terms. Good conversationalists could sharpen their wits, writers could share their dilemmas, politicians could arrange compromises, the lonely could find simple warmth. In Lloyd's coffee house, marine insurance had its beginnings. At Wills, Addison was to have his chair by the fire in winter and by the window in summer.

This was London in 1698. As for the larger polity, England itself, the seventeenth century was a time of transition from the small, relatively insignificant sixteenth-century island kingdom of Queen Elizabeth I to the great European power and world empire of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. When Elizabeth died in 1603, and with her the Tudor Dynasty, England was free of the ambitions of Spain, having beaten off Philip II and his armada. But England remained a peripheral

London

scheme against him; only two weeks before his departure abroad, the plot of the Streltsy Colonel Tsykler had been discovered. Now, again they had used violent language against his foreign friends and himself and had marched on Moscow intending to overthrow the state. Peter was weary of it all: the nuisance as well as the danger, the arrogant claims to special privilege and to fight only when and where they wished, the poor performance as soldiers, the fact that they were semi-medieval figures in a modern world. Once and for all, one way or another, ~~he would be rid of them.~~

Interrogation meant questioning under torture. Torture in Russia in Peter's day was used for three purposes: to force men to speak; as punishment, even when no information was desired; and as a prelude to or refinement of death by execution. Traditionally, three general methods of torture were used in Russia: the batog, the knout and fire.

A batog was a small rod or stick about the thickness of a man's finger, commonly used to beat an offender for lesser crimes. The victim was spread on the floor, lying on his stomach, his back bared and his legs and arms extended. Two men applied batogs simultaneously to the bare back, one sitting or kneeling on the victim's head and arms, the other on his legs and feet. Facing each other, the two punishers wielded their sticks rhythmically in turn, "keeping time as smiths do at an anvil until their rods were broken in pieces and then they took fresh ones until they were ordered to stop." Laid on indiscriminately over a prolonged time with a weakened victim, the batogs could cause death, although this was not usually the case.

More serious punishment or interrogation called forth the knout, a savage but traditional method of inflicting pain in Russia. The knout was a thick, hard leather whip about three and a half feet long. A blow from the knout tore skin from the bare back of a victim and, when the lash fell repeatedly in the same place, could bite through to the bone. The degree of punishment was determined by the number of strokes inflicted; fifteen to twenty-five was considered standard; more than that often led to death.

Applying the knout was skilled work. The wielder, observed John Perry, applied "so many strokes on the bare back as are appointed by

the judges, first making a step back and giving a spring forward at every stroke, which is laid on with such force that the blood flies at every stroke and leaves a weal behind as thick as a man's finger. And these [knout] masters as the Russians call them, are so exact in their work that they very rarely strike two strokes in the same place, but lay them on the whole length and breadth of a man's back, by the side of each other with great dexterity from the top of a man's shoulders down to the waistband of his breeches."

Normally, to receive the knout, the victim was lifted and spread across the back of another man, frequently some strong fellow selected by the knoutmaster from among the spectators. The victim's arms were tied over the shoulders of his stationary porter and his legs around the porter's knees. Then, one of the knoutmaster's assistants grabbed the victim by the hair, pulling his head out of the way of the rhythmic strokes of the lash that were falling on the outspread, heaving back.

If desired, the knout could be applied in an even more terrible way. The victim's hands were tied behind his back and a long rope was tied to his wrists and then passed over the branch of a tree or an overhead beam. Pulling down on the rope meant hoisting the victim into the air with his arms revolving backward the wrong way in their shoulder sockets. To make sure that the arms were pulled completely out of joint, a heavy log or other weight was sometimes tied to the victim's feet. With the victim already in agony, the knoutmaster then flailed the distended back with the designated number of strokes, whereupon the victim was lowered to the ground and his arms were wrenched back into joint again. In some cases, this torture would be repeated on a weekly basis until the victim confessed.

Torture by fire was common—sometimes alone, sometimes in combination with other tortures. In its simplest form, interrogation by fire meant that the victim's hands and feet are tied and he is fixed on a long pole, as upon a spit, and he has his raw back roasted over the fire and he is examined and called upon to confess." In some cases, a man who had just been knouted was taken down and tied to this kind of pole, so that the back being roasted was already raw and bleeding from the whip. Or a man still suspended in the air after receiving the knout would have his bleeding back touched and probed with a red-hot iron.

In general, executions in Russia were similar to those in other coun-

tries. Offenders were burned to death, hanged or beheaded. Victims were burned in the middle of a pile of logs filled with straw. Beheading required the victim to place his head on a block and submit to the blow of an axe or sword. This easy, instant death was sometimes made harder by first lopping off the hands and feet. Executions of this kind were so common, wrote one Dutch traveler, "that if one is performed at one end of town, in the other they seldom know anything of it." Counterfeits were punished by taking their false coins, melting them down and pouring the molten metal down their throats. Rapists were castrated.

Although public torture and execution were no novelty to any seventeenth-century European, what struck most visitors to Russia was the stoicism, "the unconquerable stubbornness" with which most Russians accepted these terrible agonies. They steadfastly resisted hideous pain, refusing to betray friends, and when condemned to death they went meekly and calmly to the gallows or block. An observer in Astrakhan saw thirty rebels beheaded in less than half an hour. There was no noise or clamor. The condemned men simply went to the block and laid their heads in the pools of blood left by their predecessors. None even had his hands tied behind him.

This incredible hardness and unconquerable endurance of pain astonished not only foreigners but also Peter himself. Once, after a man had been tortured four times by knout and fire, Peter approached him in sheer wonder and asked how he could stand such great pain. The man was happy to talk about it and revealed to Peter the existence of a torture society of which he was a member. He explained that nobody was admitted without first being tortured, and that thereafter promotion within the society rested on being able to accept higher grades of torture. To this bizarre group, the knout was nothing. "The sharpest pain of all," he explained to Peter, "is when a burning coal is placed in the ear; nor is it less painful when the head is shaved and extremely cold water is let fall slowly drop by drop upon it from a height."

More astonishing and even touching was the fact that sometimes the same Russians who could withstand the knout and fire and remain mute until death would break if handled with kindness. This happened with the man who told Peter of the torture society. He had refused to

utter a word of confession although he had been tortured four times. Peter, seeing that he was invulnerable to pain, walked up to him and kissed him, saying, "It's no secret to me that you know about the plot against me. You have been punished enough. Now confess of your own accord out of the love you owe me as your sovereign. And I swear, by the God who has made me tsar, not only to completely pardon you, but in addition, as a special mark of my clemency, to make you a colonel." This unorthodox approach so unnerved and moved the prisoner that he took the Tsar in his arms and said, "For me, this is the greatest torture of all. There is no other way you could have made me speak." He told Peter everything, and the Tsar, true to the bargain, pardoned him and promoted him to colonel.

The seventeenth century, like all the centuries before and since, was a time of hideous cruelty. Torture was practiced in all countries and for a variety of crimes, particularly those against the sovereign or the state. Usually, since the sovereign *was* the state, any form of opposition from assassination down to the mildest grumbling against him was classified as treason and punished accordingly. But a man could also be tortured and killed for attending the wrong church or for picking a pocket.

Throughout Europe, those who touched the person or the dignity of the king suffered the full fury of the law. In France, in 1613, the assassin of Henri IV was torn to pieces by four horses in the Place de l'Hôtel de Ville in front of a huge crowd of Parisians who brought their children and their picnic lunches. A sixty-year-old Frenchman had his tongue torn out and was sent to the galleys for insulting the Sun King. Ordinary criminals in France were beheaded, burned or broken alive on the wheel. In Italy, travelers complained of the public gallows: "We see so much human flesh along the highways that trips are disagreeable." In England, the "peine forte et dure" was applied to criminals: A board was placed on the victim's chest and, one by one, weights were added until breath and life were crushed out. The penalty for treason in England was to be hanged, drawn and quartered. In 1660, Samuel Pepys wrote in his diary, "I went out to Charing Cross to see Major-General Harrison hanged, drawn and quartered, which was done there, he looking

as cheerfully as any man could do in that condition. He was presently cut down and his head and heart shown to the people at which there were great shouts of joy."

Nor was cruel retribution restricted to political crimes. Witches were burned in England during Peter's lifetime and still were being hanged a century later. In 1692, six years before the Streltsy revolt, twenty young women and two dogs were hanged for witchcraft in Salem, Massachusetts. Through most of the eighteenth century, Englishmen were executed for stealing five shillings, and women were hanged for stealing a handkerchief. In the Royal Navy, infractions of discipline were commonly punished with a cat-o'-nine-tails. These floggings, which often resulted in death, were not abolished until 1881.

All this is told to provide perspective. Few of us in the twentieth century will wish to be hypocritically surprised at the barbarism of earlier times. Nations still execute traitors. Torture and mass executions still take place, both in war and in peace, made more efficient and more indiscriminate now by the instruments of modern technology. In our own time, the authorities of more than sixty nations, among them Germans, Russians, Frenchmen, Britons, Americans, Japanese, Vietnamese, Koreans, Filipinos, Hungarians, Spaniards, Turks, Greeks, Brazilians, Chileans, Uruguayans, Paraguayans, Iranians, Iraqis, Ugandans and Indonesians, have tortured on behalf of the state. Few centuries can claim a more hellish achievement than Auschwitz. Today, in psychiatric hospitals, Soviet political dissidents are tortured with destructive drugs designed not only to break down resistance but to subvert personality. And only modern technology can provide a spectacle such as the hanging of fourteen Jews in Baghdad's Liberation Square before a crowd of half a million . . . and, for those who couldn't be present, hours of television close-ups of the dangling bodies.

In Peter's time, as in ours, torture was carried out to gather information, and public execution to deter further crimes. The fact that innocent men have confessed to escape further pain has never stopped torture, nor has the execution of criminals ever stopped crime. Undeniably, the state has a right to defend itself against people who break its laws, and perhaps even a duty to try to deter future infringements, but how far into repression and cruelty can a state or society descend before the means no longer justify the end? It is a question as old as po-

litical theory, and it will not be answered here. But it should be borne in mind when we read what Peter did.

At the Tsar's command, Prince Romodanovsky brought all the captured traitors to Preobrazhenskoe and constructed fourteen torture chambers to receive them. Six days a week (Sunday was a day of rest), week after week, in what became an assembly line of torture, all the surviving prisoners, 1,714 men, were examined. Half of September and most of October were spent in lashing and burning the Streltsy with knout and flame. Those who had already confessed to one charge were reinterrogated on another. As soon as one rebel had revealed some new bit of information, all those who had already been questioned were dragged back in for reexamination on this point. Those who had lost their strength and almost their minds under torture were handed over to doctors to be restored by treatment so that they might be questioned further under new, excruciating tortures.

Major Karpakov, deeply implicated as one of the leaders of the rebellion, after being knouted and having his back roasted by fire, lost the power to speak and fainted. Worried that he might die prematurely, Romodanovsky put him in the care of Peter's personal physician, Dr. Carbonari. As soon as he was restored, he was again subjected to torture. A second officer who had also lost the power to speak was handed over to Dr. Carbonari for rehabilitation. By mistake, the doctor left his knife behind in the cell after working over the prisoner. The officer, unwilling that his life, which he knew was almost ended, be restored so that he could suffer more tortures, seized the knife and tried to cut his own throat. But he was already too weak and could not cut deeply enough. Before he could do himself fatal damage, his hand went limp and he fainted. He was discovered, partially cured and returned to torture.

All of Peter's principal friends and retainants were involved in the carnage. Men such as Romodanovsky, Boris Golitsyn, Shein, Sureshnev, Peter Prozorovsky, Michael Cherkassky, Vladimir Dolgoruky, Ivan Troekurov, Fedor Shcherbatov and Peter's old tutor and Prince-Pope, Zorov, were chosen to participate, as a special mark of the Tsar's confidence. If the plot had spread and boyars were involved, Peter counted